

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Initiatives and Actions to Combat Terrorism

International terrorism threatens the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its allies and the global community. Defeating the terrorist enemy requires sound policies, concerted government efforts and international cooperation. The primary mission of the Saudi government is to forge partnerships with multilateral organizations and foreign governments to advance counterterrorism objectives and protect the national security of the Kingdom. Working with international partners, Saudi Arabia has taken a leading role in developing coordinated strategies to defeat terrorists at home and abroad, to thwart extremist advancements and to rehabilitate at-risk populations.

Background

For the Saudi people, terrorism and extremism have existed as threats dating back for several decades. The most recent manifestation of multinational terrorist efforts—led by Al-Qaeda and its supporters—originated with the end of the Cold War and ongoing strife in post-Soviet Afghanistan. Commensurate with the rise of this threat, Saudi Arabia sought to isolate and defeat it, and as early as 1994 froze the assets and rescinded the citizenship of Osama bin Laden. The Kingdom sought to improve its international partnerships, and took steps to facilitate the extradition of terror suspects and upgrade intelligence gathering capabilities.

Following the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen in 2000 and the attacks of September 11, 2001, Saudi Arabia intensified its efforts to go after the men, money and mindset that support terrorism and extremism. Provoked by the Kingdom's actions, as well as by military activities in neighboring Iraq, Al-Qaeda commenced a number of direct attacks in Saudi Arabia in 2003—including bombings and kidnappings. Saudi Arabia's counterterrorism framework allowed security forces to mount a coordinated response that has since effectively dismantled Al-Qaeda's organization in the Kingdom. The last in-country attack by Al-Qaeda operatives took place in February 2006, and failed; security at the targeted facility thwarted the attack.

The Men: Counterterrorism Training & Technology

During the last decade, the Saudi government, the Ministry of Interior and relevant agencies have fundamentally restructured operations and coordination to better address national security threats and prevent terrorist attacks. Much of this activity has been aimed at dismantling the physical presence of Al-Qaeda and the ability of militants to operate from or within the Kingdom.

To do so effectively, the size, training and professionalism of Saudi security forces have increased on a year-over-year basis. Security professionals regularly participate in joint programs throughout the world, including in Europe and the United States. Recently, the Training College of Naif Arab University for Security Sciences and the Council of Arab Interior Ministers jointly organized a course in Tunisia on combating terrorism. The course

covered topics such as terror cells, the role of religion in fighting terrorism, the contradiction of terrorism with Islamic law, and the Saudi experience in dealing with terrorism.

Saudi security agents also work with their international counterparts to conduct missions and exchange information. Saudi Arabia and the United States have established two joint task forces—one that pursues leads to terrorist activities and another that tracks terror financing.

These efforts to enhance the sophistication of Saudi Arabia's human resources have been complemented by the deployment of new technologies that assist in safeguarding the Kingdom. Examples include:

- Aerial reconnaissance drones that patrol remote areas and provide security forces with real-time data to protect against smuggling and infiltration.
- Thermal imaging systems, motion detectors and electronic sensor fencing that assist in sealing Saudi Arabia's borders with Iraq, Yemen and Jordan.
- A dedicated 15,000-troop armed boarder patrol that covers both land and sea with a fleet of four-wheel-drive vehicles, boats and helicopters.

In addition to adopting enhanced tactics to patrol the county's desolate borderlands, the Saudi government has also implemented soft-counterterrorism measures designed to confront threats in the Kingdom's dense urban areas. Neighborhood police units engage and work directly with community members, encouraging citizens to provide tips and leads about suspicious activity. This approach has led to arrests of most-wanted terrorists and to the discovery of safe houses where terrorists were meeting, plotting and staging attacks.

Throughout the last decade, these activities—training, education, the inclusion of technology and community outreach—have allowed Saudi security forces to foil more than 180 terrorist plots within the Kingdom and to dismantle Al-Qaeda's operations. The last in-country terrorist attack took place in February 2006, when four militants attempted to break into Saudi Aramco's Abqaiq oil facility. Together, Saudi security forces and Saudi Aramco employees thwarted the attack, and reconnaissance of fleeing suspects resulted in the capture of additional suspects and the discovery of additional terrorist safe houses.

Despite their effectiveness, these activities have not come without sacrifice. In combating terrorist-related events, more than 90 Saudi security officers have died and more than 200 have been wounded carrying out their duties. Casualty rates have decreased in recent years, as a result of improved training, experience and preventative activities—including increased efforts to combat the financing of terrorism and to eradicate the influence of extremist ideologies.

The Money: Combating Terror Financing

By 2003, the Saudi government had put in place the majority of its new financial controls and banking regulations aimed at stopping those who financially support terrorism and extremism within Saudi borders and beyond. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) had issued instructions to all Saudi financial institutions to implement the 40

recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) of the G-8 countries regarding money laundering and the eight recommendations regarding terror financing. The Saudi Arabian Financial Crimes Unit was also established, and in September 2005 it transitioned to become the Kingdom's official Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), specially tasked with handling money laundering and terror finance cases. Saudi Arabia is currently seeking its admittance into the Egmont Group.

The FATF commented on all of these activities in its 15th annual report (July 2004), which contained an evaluation of Saudi Arabia's laws, regulations and systems to combat money laundering and terror financing. According to the report: "Saudi authorities have focused heavily on systems and measures to counter terrorism and the financing of terrorism. Specifically, they have taken action to increase the requirements for financial institutions on customer due diligence, established systems for tracing and freezing terrorist assets, and tightened the regulation and transparency of charitable organizations."

To ensure the success of these controls and regulations, the Saudi government created special training programs for bankers, prosecutors, judges, customs officers and other officials from government departments and agencies. Programs are offered by the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences (formerly the Naif Arab Academy for Security Sciences) and the King Fahd Security Faculty, Public Security Training City. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) also offers programs, and has implemented a technical program to train judges and investigators on legal matters involving terrorism financing and money laundering methods, international requirements for financial secrecy, and methods exercised by criminals to exchange information.

A central aspect of regulating financial controls has been ensuring oversight of charitable giving -- a key tenet of the Islamic faith. There are thousands of Islamic charities in the Kingdom. To bring order to these organizations, the Saudi government instituted direct oversight of charitable organizations, and through SAMA instructed all banks and financial institutions in the Kingdom to stop all financial transfers by Saudi charities to any accounts outside the Kingdom. The government consolidated oversight in 2004, through the issuance of a Royal order approving the creation of the Saudi National Commission for Relief and Charity Work Abroad with the responsibility for regulating all charitable activities abroad.

Saudi Arabia took additional steps to seek out and stop ongoing illicit activities. The Saudi government and the United States jointly designated several organizations as financiers of terrorism under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1267, including: the Bosnia-based Vazir and the Liechtenstein-based Hochburg AG; four branch offices of the Al-Haramain Foundation (Kenya, Tanzania, Pakistan and Indonesia); and, earlier in the year, five additional branch offices of Al-Haramain—an organization which is now dissolved.

The Kingdom coordinates such efforts with multiple international partners, including Great Britain, which, together with Saudi Arabia, jointly froze the assets of Saad Al-Faqih's London-based Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA) for allegedly providing support to Al-Qaeda. Al-Faqih is named on the UN Security Council Resolution 1267 list of individuals tied to Al-Qaeda.

Since terrorists and terror financiers do not operate solely within the borders of any particular nation, Saudi Arabia holds international cooperation as a central component to the success of its counterterrorism efforts. Saudi officials, security and counterterrorism experts work with their counterparts at every level of governments throughout the world to ensure programmatic effectiveness and to maintain cooperation.

Specifically, to help further patrol the areas of charity, banking and money laundering, agents from the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) work with Saudi financial experts to track leads and share intelligence. In February 2008, Saudi Arabia and France signed a new civil service agreement to enhance bilateral cooperation in the areas of counterterrorism, anti-narcotics and to combat money laundering.

Since the formulation of these controls and the implementation of the training programs, the Saudi government has prosecuted numerous individuals suspected of financing terrorism, and has frozen bank accounts, filed charges against and convicted individuals.

The Mindset: Overcoming Extremism

As a part of Saudi Arabia's long-term counterterrorism strategy, and to complement efforts to track and halt the activities of terrorists and terror financiers, the Kingdom pursues "soft" counterterrorism policies. These include everything from direct outreach to Saudi society at large to terrorist reeducation efforts. This approach constitutes a "war of ideas," which aims to instill the concepts of moderation and tolerance, and to undermine any justifications for extremism and terrorism on an intellectual level. In doing so, Saudi Arabia is protecting vulnerable groups, such as youth, and any potentially disenfranchised elements of society.

Broadly, the Kingdom has undertaken several initiatives to counter the extremist mentality and to promote moderation and tolerance among its citizenry.

- Public Awareness Campaign: Initiated a public awareness campaign to reinforce the true values of the Islamic faith and to educate Saudi citizens about the dangers of extremism and terrorism. The campaign included advertisements on television, radio and billboards, as well as programs on television, in schools and mosques, and at sporting events. The centerpiece of the campaign was a series of public service announcements that aired up to 25 times a day on a number of Arabic satellite networks, including Al-Arabiya, MBC and Future Television, as well as on Saudi TV channels. Six government ministries coordinated the development and execution of the programs.
- Public & Religious Education: Conducting an ongoing program to modernize textbooks and curricula, to introduce enhanced teaching methods and provide better training for educators. Efforts such as these combat extremism and prepare Saudi citizens for life in a global economy. These developments also extend to Saudi religious schools. Imams have been prohibited from incitement and talk of intolerance, and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs is conducting a program to educate imams and monitor mosques and religious education to purge extremism and intolerance.

- Global Interfaith Dialogue Initiative: Launched an international effort to promote interfaith dialogue. In early 2008, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz launched the interfaith dialogue as a way to underscore the commonalities among the world's religions. To initiate this endeavor, King Abdullah convened a meeting on June 4, 2008 of more than 500 Muslim scholars from around the world. The conference highlighted the importance of dialogue and emphasized the need for the faiths and cultures of the world to combat extremism and intolerance. This was followed by the World Conference on Dialogue in Spain on July 16, 2008. The conference, hosted by King Abdullah and King Juan Carlos I of Spain, brought together 300 delegates from around the world representing Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism and Shintoism. The culmination of this dialogue initiative was a special session of the UN General Assembly on November 12, 2008, attended by more than 25 world leaders including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, former U.S. President George W. Bush, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari, Philippino President Gloria Arroyo, Israeli President Shimon Peres and Jordan's King Abdullah II.

On a more advanced, focused level, Saudi Arabia has also been conducting two different, yet complementary programs: "Counter-Radicalization" and "Rehabilitation." Whereas the broader public programs are preventative in nature, each of these programs go directly to the active source of extremism propagation and serve to neutralize it.

In creating these programs, Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Interior drew on the expertise of a group of international social scientists, psychiatrists, psychologists, and other physicians and experts to create strategies tailored to radicalism. In addition, the Ministry has been working in conjunction with King Fahd Security College and Naif Arab University for Security Sciences to develop and refine the training activities for public security professionals.

- Counter-Radicalization Program: The purpose of the program is to combat the spread and appeal of extremist ideologies among the general populous. It strives to instill the true values of the Islamic faith, such as tolerance and moderation. Central to this effort is education about the dangers of radical Islam—consisting of school and religious programs and popular pronouncements, and the provision of positive, alternative outlets for at-risk groups—such as encouraging participation in sporting events and athletic programs, social outings, etc.
- Rehabilitation Program: The rehabilitation program is intended to reintegrate deviants/extremists back into society, change their behavior (disengage them) and change their beliefs (de-radicalize them). It is designed to target deviants who have completed their prison sentences. The program reeducates violent extremists and extremist sympathizers through intensive religious debates and psychological counseling. The goal is for them to renounce ideologies that espouse terrorism. Any individual who has committed or participated in a violent crime, constituting murder, will not be released following completion of the course.

Saudi Arabia's rehabilitation program for detainees is the longest continually functioning rehabilitation program in the world, and several countries are establishing similar programs based on the Kingdom's model, including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the United States military through "Task Force 134" in Iraq.

While the program has obtained positive results, the Saudi government views terrorism as a serious, ongoing threat and the Kingdom continues to refine its programs and enlist more detainees in hopes of disengaging and de-radicalizing them.

Conclusion

Although successful in the design and implementation of its counterterrorism programs during the last decade, Saudi Arabia continues to perfect its initiatives, as terrorism remains a continuing threat to the safety and security of its citizenry and those of the global community. Greater international cooperation and coordination will only serve to further mitigate extremist incitement and terrorist activities. To this end, the Kingdom has taken many steps to generate improved international cooperation, including in 2005, when King Abdullah held the "Counter-Terrorism International Conference" in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The event featured ministerial-level delegates from 51 countries and nine international organizations who participated in various counterterrorism workshops and sessions.

Saudi Arabia continues to seek ways to improve its ability to identify, penetrate and dismantle terrorist plots through structural reforms, the development of new intelligence and law enforcement tools, and an approach that values information sharing, communication and prevention. The Kingdom conducts its counterterrorism programs with international partners.



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